

Bosses Need to Realize Labor Isn't Scarce, It's Just Different

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MERTZON, Texas — The labor problem in the shortgrass country has been over-publicized to an extent that the resulting exaggerated claims would shock the editors of such fantasies as the Congressional Record. No other menace, real or imagined, has been given so much baseless attention as the alleged shortage of labor.

To prove this, one need look no farther than the shearing crews which are now tearing across the country at full speed. These sheep barbers are burning up the roadways to get from one job to the next.

It is true that the capitan may be handicapped a bit on the days when only half his peelers are in a proper mood to work. And of course the fact that the wool pickers and handlers aren't much good until mid-afternoon, due to the time lost massaging their temples and drinking ice water, tends to slow the operation. But all things considered, the shearing crews today are functioning as smoothly as in 1965. And as anyone knows who has seen it take 25 stitches to close a shearing cut, '65 wasn't nearly so bad a season as the one in which all the shearers went either to the Army or to the Northwest.

Ranchers are the principal spreaders of propaganda about the labor problem.

On the surface, it appears that cowboys are harder to locate than trolley car mechanics. But it's a different story when you take into account that the cowhands have been replaced by scores of bench-bound experts who are experienced in any phase of town-based ranch work.

So the problem is not a shortage of laborers, but merely a situation in which the ranchers keep insisting that to carry out a livestock stalking and containing exercise, they need a mounted human with enough knowledge of the rangelands to at least find the house at dinner time. They refuse to admit that on many occasions their roundup crews are made up entirely of the aforementioned type of specialists, and that these thinkers were quite efficient at sitting on low-swung gates, smoking, or dangling a branding iron like a riding crop.

Instead, the ranchers continue to cling to their old ways, refusing to hire efficiency experts or even offering to alter their schedule to avoid conflict with holidays (both church and state) and such nationwide attractions as the World Series and the Kentucky Derby.

A similar state of confusion is found in industries related to ranching. The wool warehouse operators, for example, are wasting countless hours and untold talent in unfounded worry; they suffer from the misguided viewpoint that federal programs are causing their source of labor to be indifferent to work — whether it be steady, temporary or piece work. They grumble endlessly over their prospective employees' ability to adjust to free-handed government policies. And they will talk their heads off, if the chance comes, to denounce the new two-day work week as compared to the oldtime Gregorian calendar week of seven days.

Actually, there is no hope for this sort of management. They refuse to accept progress. Further, they will not admit that anything coming from Washington is bound to be either for the benefit of the majority or the minority.

In fact, the warehousemen have threshed and bellowed so long and loud about their situation that the general public believes the whole pack is suffering from some type of persecution complex, and the government just happens to be their scapegoat.

In time, this imaginary problem will work itself out. The Bosses eventually will understand that there is plenty of help available; all they need to do is become current with this magnificent age.

And heaven knows it's about time, because it's getting mighty tiresome to hear these hombres fuss and fume so, when their entire problem is nothing more than failure to adjust to the era that the Indians would have called "the Time of the Velvet Cushion."